



## MySpace, Facebook, Bebo, Tagged, Xanga, Live Journal . . . . .

Social networking sites offer users an opportunity to share their interests, personal stories, photos, thoughts, etc. with friends, family, and complete strangers—known as “friends” on some sites. There are hundreds of sites used by millions of individuals. Educators have a right to maintain a presence on the sites, but they can also be disciplined if their social networking interferes with their ability to fulfill their role as an educator.

The following are suggested best practices for social networking by educators:

- Only allow students to access your social networking site if it is completely professional and only contains information for instructional purposes. Do not allow students to access your personal information or site.
- If you use a social networking site for instructional purposes, keep administrators and parents informed of your use.
- Maintain a professional relationship with students on your social networking site.
- Do not use or allow derogatory, offensive, obscene, protected, or libelous comments.
- Even if your site is purely personal and no students are allowed to be your “friend,” always weigh whether your posting puts your effectiveness as a teacher at risk.
- Post only what you want the world to see. Social networking sites, even if labeled private, are still accessible to the public. A private post may be copied and shared by another “friend” and wind up traveling the Internet. No site is perfectly secure, so only post items you would like your students, their parents, your administrator, a potential employer or your parents to see.
- Never discuss students or colleagues
- Don’t post images that include students
- Don’t friend students on social networking sites unless the site is completely school related and you have followed all district policies regarding social networking sites
- Don’t ask to be a student’s friend on a social networking site
- If contacted by a student via a social networking site, inform the parent
- Monitor your site regularly—remove postings from friends that are inappropriate
- Do not access your site using school equipment or resources
- Even if the site is school related and approved, do not install external applications. Do use malware to avoid spyware and adware
- Remember that a friend can download and share your information with others
- Remember that employers in many fields now Google applicants and will check a social networking site when making hiring decisions
- Do not share any information about students on a personal social networking site
- Keep in mind that electronic communications are much easier to misinterpret and even an innocent comment can be taken far out of context on a social networking site or blog



## Policy Considerations:

- If you allow students to text you, limit it to school-related messages.
- If students send a text regarding non-school related issues, let them know it is not appropriate.
- Inappropriate communications with students in any electronic or other format may be grounds for termination and loss of your educator license.
- If you use the phone to contact students, your district may be able to search it for inappropriate texts with students.
- Include parents in your discussion with a student who may have crossed the line in a text message.

## Legal Issues:

- Courts have yet to find that an educator has a right to associate with students outside of school or cross professional boundaries with students off school grounds. If the educator's personal texting to students is causing a disruption in the school or has a negative effect on the educator's ability to perform his or her professional duties, including acting as a role model, the district can take employment action.
- If you suspect a teacher is involved in a sexual relationship with a student and their may be incriminating text messages, contact law enforcement.
- If a teacher receives a sexually suggestive photo from a student, he or she may be guilty of receiving child pornography.
- Text messaging is increasingly used by educators who are grooming students for sexual relationships. Districts are adopting strong policies prohibiting personal contact with students through text messages, including termination for inappropriate contact with students. Check district policy on cell phones, texting, and other electronic communications with students before using technology in the classroom.

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